SYNOPSIS FOR THE PHD THESIS

PORTRAYAL OF MUSLIMS IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE 9/11 EPISODE

Submitted by

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Introduction:

It is an established fact that literature is a powerful medium to mould one's view about the world and its people. Representation contributes to the positive or negative perception and understanding of a person or community. Looking back in the pages of history we find that in the twelfth century, European scholars had gained substantial knowledge about Islam, but they always considered Islam as an opposing force to Christianity.

Orientalism, which is writing about East, emphasizes and tries to establish the importance of the East and the people and culture of East. Orientalism became all the more popular during the nineteenth century, with the popularisation of travel writing. Orientalists discuss the attitudes of writers towards Muslims and go on to explain why a troubled image of Muslims is presented to the world. Edward Said in one of his interviews says:

> The sense of Islam as a threatening Other - with Muslims depicted as fanatical, violent, lustful, irrational - develops during the colonial period in what I called Orientalism. The study of the Other has a lot to do with the control and dominance of Europe and the West generally in the Islamic world. And it has persisted because it's based very, very deeply in religious roots, where Islam is seen as a kind of competitor of Christianity. (Said 54)

The seventeenth century Romantic Movement and later the decolonisation process in 1940s and 50s helped a great deal in the upliftment of the image of the Muslims in literature but it is believed that due to the 9/11 event, this image received a further setback.

Professor A.R.Kidwai in *Orientalism in English Literature* very rightly remarks –

> On studying the English literary texts which are representative of Literary Orientalism, one comes across "a range of responses, from sheer hatred and revulsion to demonization, caricature, contempt, ridicule, light-hatred humour, and occasional acclaim, respect and appreciation" (p. xii).

The proposed thesis will try to examine the kinds of effects of the 9/11 episode on the image of Muslims in literature. Further, the research work will try to highlight the common misconceptions about Islam that are portrayed in literature, specifically contemporary fiction. For this purpose, an in depth study and analysis of six selected contemporary post 9/11 novels with the representation of Muslim characters in specific and Islam in general will be attempted. It is

hypothesized that a careful analysis of the selected works will establish the fact that the 9/11 episode has developed prejudices and biases in the depiction of Muslims and Islam in literature. Further, a comparison of the selected novels with some pre-9/11 works of literary pieces will be attempted. The analysis will bring to fore the fact that whether the depiction of Muslims and Islam has changed after the 9/11 event or it has always been the same.

For the proposed study, the following novels have been selected –

The Teeth of the Tiger (2003) by Tom Clancy focuses on the fighting and killing of the Arab terrorists. It follows the adventures of Jack Ryan and the Caruso brothers, Bryan and Dominic. The novel presents how the team travels across Europe, finding and murdering several players in a terrorist organization.

Minaret (2004) by Leila Aboulela challenges the stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims. She portrays her Muslim characters Najwa and Tamer in a positive light. Najwa, a wealthy heiress from Sudan is forced to take a job as maid in London after her family suffers a great financial loss. It is in London that she embraces her faith and gains serenity and contempt through Islam. Whereas, Tamer is a devout Muslim but he is not anti-western or a fanatic, as is the popular belief about Muslims.

Prayers for the Assassin (2006) by Robert Ferrigno is set in 2040, it envisages an America run by Muslims- 'Islamic Republic of USA'. It depicts the story Sarah Dougan who gets kidnapped and her secret lover Rakim Epps, a shadow warrior, is given the task of rescuing her. The novel portrays a very disturbing image of Islam as being a religion that is extremely intolerant towards non-Muslims.

Terrorist (2006) by John Updike is a novel which reproduces the stereotypes about Islam and Muslim, fostering violent thinking and intolerance towards non-Muslims. The story centres on an American Muslim boy, Ahmad who is a practicing Muslim and how he gets entangled in a terrorist plot.

Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) by Mohsin Hamid was shortlisted for the Man-Booker prize in 2007. The novel portrays the troubles of racism and the discrimination which a Pakistani Changez faces post 9/11 and how his life takes a turn due to it.

The Moor's Account (2014) by Laila Lalami was one of the finalists for the Pulitzer Prize. The novel is a fictional memoir of Mustafa ibn Muhammad, a Moroccan slave, who was amongst the surviving four members of an expedition group. The novel portrays how a lone Muslim sold and

resold ends up being a part of the ill-fated journey of life. He was the only Muslim amongst the Spaniards, who survives the journey and ultimately becomes a free man.

Hypothesis:

A close reading of the novels will force the readers to think about the conflicting portrayal of the Muslims in fiction and the role of the author in the portrayal of characters and communities.

It is also believed that an in-depth analysis of the selected novels will help to bring to fore the differences in the depiction of Muslims and Islam by Muslims and non-Muslim writers. It is hypothesized that because of the 9/11 episode the image of Muslims received a setback and it made the biases against Muslims all the more stronger.

Literature Review:

The portrayal of Muslims in literature has always been a controversial topic, because their depiction is marred by prejudices and the contemporary literature continues to generalize these prejudices further. In this multicultural world to depict Muslims in stereotypical biased way will be an act of sheer ignorance.

Edward Said's 'Orientalism' has been an inspiration for the proposed research work. Said in 'Orientalism' brilliantly argues about the troubled image of the Muslims in the works of orientalists and how this practice has prevailed for a very long time. He suggests that Muslim writers should start writing about their own culture and identity in order to change their stereotypical image.

Cemil Ayden in his 'The Idea of the Muslim World' (2017), talks about the complex relationship between Islam and the West and how the prejudices against Muslim rose considerably during the nineteenth century.

Similarly, Pallavi Laisram in her 'Viewing the Islamic Orient' (2006) studies the travel accounts of four British travellers during the nineteenth century. She shows how the west often struggled with their own idea of the Orient. The people from the west, even if they had travelled extensively in their lands, had trouble separating facts from fiction.

Some of the other scholars whose works will be consulted during the course of this study are Prof. A.R.Kidwai, Samuel Huntington and Norman Daniel.

Research Methodology:

Literary Orientalism is 'a new, emerging subfield of English studies', it serves as a window to view the centuries-long hostile, relationship between Islam and non-Islam. The research will focus on analysing the imagology, representation and cross-cultural encounter which stand for the biased depiction of Islam and Muslims in the selected works of fiction. The stylistic devices employed by the writers in the depiction of Muslims will also be examined.

The researcher will attempt an in-depth analysis of the selected works, which will include the thematic analysis of the novels. The literary pieces will be examined in the light of the established cannons of Orientalism along with the interpretation of the works in contemporary scenario. The study also intends to focus on the character analysis which in turn will help in the better understanding of the protagonist and the biases (if any) that he faces.

Chapter Division:

The thesis will be divided into five chapters:

The First Chapter will provide information about the research topic, which is the depiction of Muslims in literature. A study of the topic from the historical perspective will be presented in this chapter. Citations from the works on the same subject will also be presented to establish the importance of the need of such kind of study.

The Second Chapter will discuss the problems related to the stereotyping of Muslims in literature and in the real world. Furthermore, an attempt will be made to clear the assumption about viewing Islam and Muslims as backward and misogynistic.

The Third Chapter will present the thematic analysis of the selected novels for a better understanding of the texts and characters.

The Fourth Chapter will deal with a comparative analysis of the portrayal of Muslims and Islam by the Muslim and Non-Muslim authors. This chapter will also investigate how the perception of the people towards the Muslim community has changed after the 9/11 episode.

The Final Chapter will provide the conclusion to the study.

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